

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, December 18, 1887, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Failure No. 2. Edgartown, Massachusetts. Sunday, Dec. 18th, 1887. My dear little wife:

I have been hard at work on Mr. Pease's materials ever since I arrived — but surely Sunday belongs to you. I have been out of doors all day with Mr. Hitz — in a clear bracing air. We have walked at least nine miles — and I have returned with my pocket full of shells and sea mosses for Elsie and Daisy — and a big appetite. The appetite has been subdued by virtue of sundry applications prepared by the delicate hands of Miss Anita and I have spent the evening on my father's couch — listening to yarns from the mouth of Capt. Abraham Osborne. His life has been a most remarkable one full of adventure and hair-breadth escapes — and some account of it should be written and printed — but I fear he never will do it himself — and no one else can do it for him.

I really shall have to try and put down in black and white for your benefit — some of his stories of adventure — but they will lack the charm of sparkling eye and expressive gesture — and the quaint utterances of a seafaring man. If I could copy his language — “My stars!” — would be an beautifully sprinkled through the whole story — as the other stars are in the sky.

“Did you ever see the Alabama Captain?”

My stars — did I ever see the Alabama? — I was took by her! My ship was the first prize she made. My eyes — Professor — I can tell you it was hard luck. We had had a first rate season — had a thousand barrels of oil on board and had just fastened to a whale a hundred feet long when we saw a steamer a coming — flying the English Flag. We had been out a long time and thought we might be able to send letters home by her — as she

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seemed to be making straight for us — so I went into the cabin and wrote a letter to my wife telling her of all our 2 good luck.

By the bye we saw that the ship carried guns — she lay to near us and sent a boat on board with the 2nd officer in charge. “How do you do” says he — “How do you do” says I. “Having pretty good luck?” said he — and then he told us as how the ship was a prize — and that we better tumble into his boat pretty lively — for they were going to sink her right there. “Why you're no better than a pirate” says I — at which he grew furious — and ordered us into his boat at once. He said his vessel was “The Alabama” — a vessel belonging to the confederate government — but we had never heard the name before. “How look a here” said I “you needn't give yourself all them fine airs — you don't think we are afraid of you do you — not at all — its them guns over there — you bet we don't go in your boat till we've changed our clothes at least — you see our clothes were all covered with blubber and oil — and if our ship was to be sunk we thought we might at all events put on decent clothes.

I ordered the officer off my ship — and so he returned to explain to his Captain while we changed our clothes. Presently another boat arrived from the Alabama in charge of the 1st officer and an armed crew — and the guns of the Alabama were trained upon us. The 1st officer was quite polite — and told us to take our time about changing our clothes. He then ordered me to lower the American Flag — but I told him if he wanted it down he'd have to do it himself — as there was no man on board who would dare to lower that flag.

He ordered a number of the men to do it — but they one and all refused — and he had to do it himself. Just then an unfortunate 3 thing happened. I had a dog on board that was generally kept tied up though he was quiet. I wouldn't have had anything happen to him for the world — he was a first rate hunting dog — and I was much attached to him. Nell this dog made a spring at the 1st officer — and grabbed him by the coat — He just missed catching him by the thigh — (and if he had — he'd have been crippled for life — as sure as you was born) — A great piece of the coat was torn out — and a hand to hand to fight

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took place — which was only terminated by four shots from a revolver — and my poor dog was dead. I never felt so sorry for anything before.

My dear May:

I cannot write — I am a miserable failure. I must write and re-write in order to give my abortive attempts to show you I have not forgotten you. They burned the ship before his eyes — put him in irons — and landed him at the Agores.

Your loving husband, Alec.